Asthma #2

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Asthma

The word asthma, is derived from the Greek term; ασθμαζω and signifies a difficulty of breathing. It was applied by the Greeks, to that, kind of difficult respiration; with which people, who run, or take violent exercise are affected. Asthma continued long, in its original meaning to embrace every species of dyspnoea or difficult respiration: but by more modern nosologists, it is confined to a particular kind of this affection. The most usual division of asthma, has been into dry or spasmodic, and humoral; how far this division is correct, I am not able to determine, but I am inclined to believe, that humoral is nothing more than the spasmodic, attacking patients advanced in life; or in whom, the spasmodic by the frequency of its attacks has produced a state of debility, And moreover, I am induced to think, that they both have the same proximate cause; and the only difference, that exist between them, is as to their effects. At least

I shall confine my description, to the spasmodic form of this disease. It is very often a hereditary disease, and attacks all ages, sexes and temperaments. It has been described as seldom coming on, sooner than the age of Puberty; but the infantile age, is by no means exempt from it; having seen in a family, in which this disease prevailed hereditarily, three instances, sooner, than that period. In the patients that, I saw, they were all of lively imaginations, quick apprehensions versatile dispositions; and rather approached towards the sanguine temperament, Patients labouring under asthmatic predispositions, are liable to have a paroxysm brought on, by all the exciting causes to be mentioned hereafter, at any time; but more particularly, during Spring and autumn. The disease generally increases in the frequency of its attacks, the violence of its symptoms and is attended, with febrile symptoms, during that period; called the Dog days. Female asth-

matics are always subject to all the irregularities of the catamenial discharge. In young females that have never menstruated; the discharge is backward, or they have what is called a reten tion of the menses; their breasts generally are small their organs of generation are slow and tardy in their developement; lascivious desires in them are almost extinct; and several years after the usu al age of puberty, they want all the character istics of that age. Young females that are the vic tims of this disease; are sometimes cured at the age of puberty; by the revolution the system un dergoes, in consequence of the regular establish ment of the menstrual discharge; and the change the genital functions sustains But consequently, after a riddance of the disease, any irregularities in the catamenial discharge, subject the indivi dual to a future attack. Illustrative of the ab ove remarks, I beg leave to relate a case; which I knew to be a fact; a lady who in the early

part of her life had been afflicted with asthma; about the fourteenth year of her age, she was relieved; and continued to enjoy uninterrupted good health, and free from any asthmatic symptoms, for several years; but low and the fortieth year; suffering some disturbance of the menstrual discharge, she was again attacked with asthma, and ever since, has continued to have regular asthmatic paroxysm. How far a diseased state of menstruation is connected with asthma, as a cause, I will not presume to say; but such is the fact; that it is so uniformly linked with it, in females;* that it claims our very particular attention. Asthma most frequently comes on in the evening; sometimes before but most frequently after sleep; however it may come on in the day; but this is very rare. Those who are subject to this disease; are always admonished by certain, and infallible precursory symptoms, of an approaching attack. Amid mirth

*either as cause or effect

[illegible] recently and [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] collapse and must become [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] extremely extraordinary
conflict, and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
The poor [illegible] is generally [illegible] [illegible] with
a deep [illegible] and [illegible], [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
come [illegible] in the chest, which [illegible] in
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] on the least [illegible] become [illegible]
and difficult, [illegible] and [illegible] laborious,
and attended with a [illegible] [illegible];
the patient [illegible] his chest with [illegible] all
[illegible] [illegible], he [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible],
the [illegible] [illegible], the shoulders [illegible], and the
[illegible] descend with apparent [illegible] during
[illegible] [illegible] the patient [illegible] in a horizontal, [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] seeks an erect position; gets [illegible] [illegible]
the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

The patient wishes to be alone or little and to lie down. It is not likely to be interrupted, and if he speaks it is in the offhand fashion and hesitatingly. He bears food, conversations, and other disturbances of long standing, or consequences of prolonged and [illegible] time, often from congested condition of the lungs, or an infected condition of the blood, [illegible] to relieve himself by calling to his aid the assistance of the intercostal and other muscles, subsequently respiration which are sympathetically thrown into action and consequently exhausted by producing the convulsive cough characteristic of the disease. The cough at first is attended with little or no expectoration, or rather is caught up, as it were, and in a little [illegible] sometimes is ejected with the blood; at long stay sometimes [illegible] and the contents of the stomach are [illegible] and the consequence confusion [illegible] of the stomach. The above symptoms [illegible] have been [illegible] and [illegible]

an accession of the disease. The straightness and stricture in the chest become less oppressive and diminished. the difficulty of breathing is diminished, the cough less convulsive, and is attended with a more free, and copious expectoration, and the patient much fatigued and exhausted, falls into a long wished for sleep. During the paroxysm the pulse is not usually much affected, but in common there is a frequency of it with chills and other febrile symptoms. Urine voided at the beginning of a paroxysm is generally in considerable quantity and pale and devoid of colour, but after the fit is over what is discharged is in ordinary quantity of a higher colour, and deposits a sediment. The remission of the symptoms continue during the succeeding day, but on the approach of the following evening, the patient is again attacked by the disease, and runs the same course as above described, and continues to do so for several evenings; about the third evening the paroxysms most frequently subside.

The length of time between the intervals of a paroxysm differs considerably, sometimes returning once in two three or four weeks and sometimes the intervals are long or shorter. It sometimes returns at different periods pretty constantly and at others with so much irregularity as scarcely to be deserving of the name of periodical, which has been attached to it. The remote predisposing cause of spasmodic asthma is most frequently hereditary or constitutional. The exciting causes, are various and diversified; as sudden vicissitudes of weather from heat to cold; from a heavier, to a lighter atmosphere, external heat or cold to be applied, exposure to night or damp air. Obstructed perspiration by determining the greater quantity of blood, to the pulmonary vessels, violent passions or emotions of the mind as anger, joy, excessive laughter &c. The most frequent of the exciting causes, are violent exercise, as running, dancing or what ever raises the temperature of the body, and suddenly exposes it to cold. Hence we

in five asthmatics returning from Hallfax, fo-
llowing a measurement, which being attended with
paroxysm, [illegible] breathing, or [illegible]
food or entering the sitting, [illegible]
[illegible] doing [illegible] from smoke, dust, and the
[illegible] floating in the atmosphere. Not a
little diversity opinion has existed, as regards the [illegible]
or proximate cause of asthma. Dr Hall, and most
other [illegible] the proximate cause of the disease
to be a preternatural or abnormal condition of
the mucous filing of the bronchiae, which not only
proceeds their being so dilated, as admit of
free and full inspiration, but also gives them a rank
[illegible] which interferes with the free and full [illegible].
This doctrine has been disputed by Dr [illegible], in
a very ingenious work on this disease, offered with
claims that an irritation located in the air cavities,
[illegible] effusion of serum, or [illegible]
[illegible] serious is the proximate cause of [illegible]
[illegible] asthma. Which of these opinions [illegible]

strongest claim to our attention, I will pass it
not to say, but I am inclined to adhere to that
of Dr Cullen. Confident that our views of the
proximate cause of diseases, in general, are vague
uncertain and superficial, I must decline offer-
ing an opinion on it, and avoid the rock on which
the chief, of our profession, have so often been
shipwrecked. But thus far will venture an
opinion; that in whatever the proximate cause may
consist, by it, the lungs are incapacitated of per-
forming, that entire and perfect, decarbonization
of the blood, which is so indispensable to
free and uninterrupted circulation through them
and which is so necessary to the health and vigor,
of the animal oeconomy. When we reflect,
on the importance of the respiratory process and
that on its healthy performance, depends in a great
measure, the regular, and harmonic operations of most
if not all of the human body, and that in as-
thma, respiration is intercepted, we will know

we are a priori led to expect an interruption in some of the other functions of the body, and of these no one is more affected than the digestion; and hence we see nausea, flatulence, sour eructations, costiveness, and other dyspeptic symptoms, which constitute so prominent a feature, in this disease. Dissections of persons who have died of this disease, have unveiled to us but little or nothing of its proximate cause, they have shown [illegible] the seats and [illegible] of the disease and left us with but little information about its nature. The terminations of asthma, if not in health, which are not frequently the case, are either in effusions in the chest, producing hydrothorax or by a rupture of some of the pulmonary vessels which finally end in pulmonary consumption or by an aneurismatic enlargement of the arch of the large bloodvessels. Without these, though from the frequency of its attacks would lead us to apprehend much danger, is seldom of itself a fatal disease.

but by running into others it may often become nearly incurable. When the attacks are neither frequent nor severe, the constitution unimpaired, the patient young, we may have some reason to expect a cure. But when it comes on at an advanced period of life the paroxysms are frequent and violent, and proceeds from an hereditary, fixed structure, it will be almost impossible to eradicate the disease. The symptoms during a paroxysm, that indicate danger, are the respiration becoming suddenly quick and short, the pulse weak and irregular, paralysis of the nervous power, deprivation of thought, a scanty secretion of urine, and a faintness at the stomach. Asthma is one of those diseases which may frequently set all our remedies at defiance, and continue its course unrestrained in spite of all our efforts [illegible]. Numerous are the remedies that have been recommended for the cure of asthma, but few, very few indeed, of this number, have been of sufficient efficacy to prevent a paroxysm, or [illegible]

[illegible] the relief of a fit, when it has occurred. In bronchial asthma naturally divided into two modes that are frequently during the paroxysm, and those frequent during the intervals. The first remedy that demands our attention is bleeding; we find considerable difference of opinion among practitioners as regards the propriety of bleeding in the paroxysm. It certainly does not seem our absolute cure of asthma but, in many patients and when not [illegible] by previous illness it is undoubtedly not even proper to deny that it might give the relief of a paroxysm, but it certainly does allow patients to consider and better fit for the exertion of our subsequent remedies. When general bleeding is indicated, local bleeding by cups and leeches are a great [illegible]. Physicians should be careful in [illegible] the leeches, from a most [illegible] [illegible]

the bronchial, [illegible] and [illegible] are doubtless
also of singular utility if properly employed. Their
administration should, other [illegible] be preceded
by purgatives. The emetic most generally beneficial is
the ipecacuanha, but either it or any substitute,
over the antimonial preparations is not advisable, on
account of its tendency to induce purging in asthma, as in most other
pulmonary affections, greatly diminished, with
that the bowels, should be kept in a regular state by
the use of the [illegible]; and for this purpose
calomel, given in small and repeated doses is admirable
[illegible]. It is at this time that the various
anodyne medicines should be employed; in some
cases the more bland medicines of this class will be
[illegible], as nauseating doses of emetic tartar;
and in others, the more stimulating opiates, such as
opium and morphia, or a variously combined. A decoction of the root of the [illegible] snake
has been in high repute. The dentrifis [illegible]
[illegible] and the [illegible] [illegible]

To prevent the expectoration and relief of the smoking the leaves and root of Datura stramonium, has been highly extolled, but I may say, at earliest, might be ascribed to the effects of the Stramonium, and its employment, would not be attended with the injurious effects, which are sometimes found to arise from the use of the Stramonium. Inhalations of the steams of warm water, and of various other substances; also the use of the fumes of turpentine thrown on burning coals have been recommended in the highest terms. The exaggerated praises that, at one time, were lavished on the use of the latter, have in the estimation of more modern physicians, deservedly sunk into insignificance. It is extremely difficult to conceive in what manner the fictitious accounts of serious, in any form of difficult or impeded respiration, for if inhaled during health, they produce difficulty and oppression in breathing, for which in asthma they are said to relieve. Opiates have

been used in asthma with various results, but if properly combined, and timely administered, there can not be the least doubt of their great utility. Ether is a medicine of considerable importance in the treatment of asthma. The various antispasmodics as asafoetida, musk, and castor, especially if given in long doses, have been recommended, as being advantageous, in combating an asthmatic paroxysm. The common garlic is said to be of some utility. The indication during the interval, is to restore strength and tone, to the alimentary canal; and endeavour, to prevent a future fit of spasm. To restore health and vigour, to the digestive functions, which are always more or less impaired; we should resort, to the various tonics and bitters; as the bark, gentian, chalybeates, zinc, cuprum vitriolatum, nitrate of silver, and other medicines suited to give health to the alimentary canal. The patient should use flannel next to his skin; should take gentle exercise, his diet mild and nutritious, and he should abstain

from all stimulating drinks. Cold bathing has been recommended, during the interval, but of the utility of this practice, I will not pretend to say. Issues, seatons, and perpetual blisters has been advised. The patient should select, that place of residence best adapted to his peculiarities of habit. We find some asthmatics, enjoy health, best, in cities, others in the country, some on elevated ground, others in low and humid situations. A circumstance that almost invariably attends, female asthmatics, which claims our particular attention, and which has been too much overlooked by writers on this subject, is a diseased condition of their menstrual discharge. In young females, it is almost always backward in appearing; in such cases, we should resort to those remedies, best adapted, to promote its flow

[illegible]

emetic given, before an expected paroxysm, would prevent its occurence; if this be a fact it will be an important point, in combating this disease; for asthmatic patients almost always have certain symptoms, that forebode an approaching attack. In preventing an attack a great deal, can be done, by patients in avoiding the exciting causes, as violent exercise, indigestible food &c; and above all, the patient should never suffer himself to be ruffled by tumultous passions, but on the other hand preserve, the utmost composure and equanimity. —